

The Battle of Saratoga

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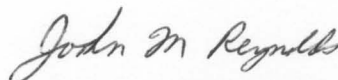
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MEMORANDUM FOR Faculty Advisor, Group Room M06, United States Army Sergeants Major Academy, Ft Bliss, TX 79918

SUBJECT: The Battle of Saratoga

1. Thesis Statement. The Battle of Saratoga was the turning point in the American's War of Independence.
2. Discussion. The Battle of Saratoga was a climactic finale to a three-year struggle for a strategic military position – the Hudson-St. Lawrence waterway. In the first Battle at Freeman's Farm, the British lost two men for every one American casualty. During the second Battle at Bemis Heights, the British lost four men for every American casualty.
3. Conclusion. The Battle of Saratoga proved to the world that the American Army was an effective fighting force capable of defeating the highly trained British forces in a major confrontation and forcing them to surrender. The European powers, mainly the French became supportive of the Americans cause and they began to support their effort against the British.
4. Counterpoint. In an opposing view, an article written by a loyalist in January 1777 seemed to be a thorn in the British ideals and a turning point in the American Revolution. Thomas Paine's Common Sense pamphlet created immediate dialogue like a lightning bolt in the colonies. Its message was simple: Britain had no right to govern America, the Monarchy system itself was corrupt, and Americans would be much better off on their own.
5. Haines Award. We (do/~~do not~~) request that the Haines Award Selection Board consider this paper for the General Haines Award for Excellence in research. *Writing Research Papers*, Tenth Edition by James D. Lester, is the guide used in the preparation of this research paper.



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Outline

Thesis: The Battle of Saratoga was the turning point in the Americans' War of Independence.

I. Introduction

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How the British originally planned the Battle

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The Battle of Saratoga was the turning point in the American's War of Independence. The American fight for independence from England was one of a David versus Goliath. England at the time of the war was the leading power in the world while America was still in its colonial phase. The world, and especially Europe, held their breath as the colonies took up arms to fight for their freedom. How could this small group of colonies, farms and towns expect to take on the world's mightiest empire and win its freedom? England had already defeated rival France and Spain and had emerged as the leading world super power of that time. Everyone expected the war to be a quick and easy victory for the British but the colonies had many things in their favor that no one counted on. The biggest and largest foe against the English was not the colonists but the entire Atlantic Ocean. It took approximately 30-40 days to cross the Atlantic in the mid 1700's. This meant that troops, supplies and orders were often delayed or late in arriving to a situation that was ever changing. At the same time, England failed to understand and anticipate the fighting spirit of the colonists and the separation of feelings that had come between the British Empire and their colonial subjects.

There were many battles during the Revolutionary War but none more important than the Battle of Saratoga. Some would argue that the Battle of Bunker Hill was the most important battle of the war (Ketchum xiii), but in reality Bunker Hill turned out to be a battle that made people take sides and that the Colonists were serious about their independence. The Battle of Saratoga was actually not one battle but two battles (Freeman's Farm and Bemis Heights). When combined they are known as the Battle of Saratoga. How and why the Battle came to be the most important for America is really a simple answer. It was the first time

that the Colonists had met and defeated an English Army that was larger and commanded by someone who was known and respected throughout the military world.

The repercussions of this loss for the English and the win for the colonists opened up the door for international support (especially from France) and turned the tide in the way the War was looked at from other countries. At the same time, it was the first major victory for the colonists, served as a major boost in morale, and led to a new fighting spirit and recruitment. The victory for the colonists was so important that the battle “is called the turning point of the American Revolution” (Byrd 2). There are many factors as to what led up to the battle, the first being who, when, and how the English planned for the battle to happen.

The original battle plan for the Battle of Saratoga came not from an English General in North America, but from Major General Burgoyne who had retired from battle and picked up the pen to write “my thoughts for conducting the war from the side of Canada”(Wood 134). General Burgoyne had retired in England and was pursuing a career in politics and writing when he wrote the battle plan. The King of England read what he wrote and liked it so much that he thought to put the plan into action and recalled General Burgoyne back to active duty. The only major problem with the plan was that it was left up to someone else to interpret and put into an actual field order. The man responsible for this transformation was Lord George Germain. The main idea behind the plan was to attack the colonial forts while controlling the rivers and waterways in the area. The purpose of the attack was to separate New England, (where resistance was the strongest), from the other colonies by land and water. The original plan called for a force under General Burgoyne to move south from Canada and attack the colonial forts at Fort Ticonderoga while a second force under General Howe moved south along a different path creating a diversion. The plan called for both forces to link up in

Albany (New York). Lord Germain and his staff failed to keep both forces informed of this, allowed the diversionary force, under General Howe to change his plan of linking up with General Burgoyne, and instead attack Philadelphia. This confusion led General Howe to believe his mission of capturing Philadelphia was more important and that meeting in Albany was no longer the priority. Meanwhile, General Burgoyne still expected to link up with General Howe and his troops in Albany, a link up that never occurred and cost the English a great defeat.

General Burgoyne's expedition left Canada on 13 June 1777 in two groups (one commanded by British Major General Phillips and the other by Germain Major General von Riedesel), moved across Lake George, and headed for Fort Ticonderoga. Although General Burgoyne did not receive all of the men that were promised to him, he was short by almost 2,000 men, he shrugged it off with the expectation of picking up loyal British supporters along the way liberating them from Colonial rule. "This was the typical illusion that British forces held throughout the war, an illusion that was consistently frustrated" (Wood 138). General Burgoyne met little resistance in the beginning of his campaign and headed across the Lake with a grand display of British Naval power. General Burgoyne's force was so impressive that the commander of Mount Independence decided to withdraw at night under the cover of darkness instead of staying and fighting the more superior, British force. This withdrawal was ill planned. It fell apart as the British took the fort with relative ease and pursued the withdrawing force with great haste. The one thing that the withdrawing force did do correctly was to block the existing road by cutting down large trees and burning existing bridges so that the Artillery and supply wagons in support of General Burgoyne's forces would have to play catch up and would not help in the pursuant battles. This would play a

major role in the battles to come and be a constant frustration to General Burgoyne. The withdrawing force under Colonial General St. Clair tried in vain to hold the advancing British Army so that he could regroup, but was not even able to slow them down due to their superior numbers. General Burgoyne's forces continued on their march toward Fort Ticonderoga with little interference (minus their artillery and supplies) and prepared for the attack on Fort Ticonderoga.

On 7 July 1777, General Burgoyne laid siege to Fort Ticonderoga. His plan was simple, overwhelm the Colonial troops with his force under British General Phillips and then lay siege to the fort. General Burgoyne's forces found the remaining colonial troops to be hard fighters who used the woods to their advantage and gave the British more than they could handle. In the beginning of the siege, the colonists not only held their own but also were actually close to defeating some of General Burgoyne's forces. "Just when things were beginning to look disastrous for the British, however, they were saved by General von Riedesel, who had rushed his men toward the sound of the fighting" (Wood 140). The ensuing battle covered more than half a mile and lasted a couple of hours before the colonists fell back into the woods to try to disappear and escape to other forts. Most of the fleeing colonial fighters would end up fighting at the later battles of Freeman's Farm and Bemis Heights. Once General Burgoyne had taken Fort Ticonderoga he had to decide on how he would travel to Albany. He could travel overland directly from Fort Ticonderoga or he could fall back to Lake George and move his forces by water and then overland via a shorter route. General Burgoyne decided that backtracking to Lake George could possible cause a drop in morale for his troops while boosting the colonist's morale so he decided to continue the

pursuit overland. It would be General Burgoyne's decision to go overland that would lead up to the twin battles known as the Battle of Saratoga.

When General Burgoyne chose to go to Albany via the overland route, he opened the door for the colonists under General Philip Schuyler who commanded the Colonial Northern Department. General Schuyler gave instructions for the colonial fighters to cut trees down across all roads and delay the enemy with skirmishes constantly along the way. General Burgoyne did not know that once they left Fort Ticonderoga "the roads were no more than crude trails hacked out of dense forests and running every which way, without plan or reason" (Wood 141). The colonists also put rocks and anything they could find onto the trails in an effort to slow the advancing British Army. General Schuyler also "instituted a scorched-earth operation in which farmers were coerced into driving away their cattle and hiding their foodstuffs" (Wood 142). This plan was so successful that it took General Burgoyne's forces "twenty-one days to move twenty-three miles" (Wood 142). The delaying action and constant skirmishes along the way served to destroy British morale and supplies.

At the same time, General Schuyler hoped to gain time by delaying the British forces so that he could acquire more and more reinforcements. This he did when he was joined by the withdrawing troops from Fort Ticonderoga and other forces under Brigadier General John Nixon and Major General Benedict Arnold. General Schuyler began to move the force toward Saratoga when he was relieved and turned command over to Major General Horatio Gates. General Schuyler was liked and respected by his men but was mainly relieved for the belief by the Continental Congress that he could not be trusted and was afraid to fight and chose to do so only when he was assured a victory. Unnoticed was the fact that General Schuyler was the one whom had held the Colonial Army together in that area and continued

to prepare them for the upcoming battle. By the time that General Gates had taken control of the Army and had moved them back to Saratoga, General Burgoyne was having all the trouble he could handle by moving overland. His supply wagons either were falling apart or were being attacked and burned by colonial fighters. As time went by General Burgoyne's British forces began to get weaker while General Gate's Colonial forces continued to grow and prepare for the upcoming battle. This would be one of the major factors later on when the two generals would face each other at a place called Freeman's Farm.

The Battle of Freeman's Farm was one of the most important battles of the American fight for independence from England. The Freeman's Farm battle began on September 19, 1777 at Freeman's Farm several miles north of Bemis Heights, north of Albany, New York. This battle was the first of two battles that led to the surrender of the British at Saratoga.

Major General John Burgoyne of the British Army having reached the Hudson on his march from Canada, found himself facing a strong American Army dug in on Bemis Heights on the west side of the Hudson River. Burgoyne had crossed the river ten miles north of the American position, and spent the next two days marching slowly down the river in three columns. The center column, commanded by Brigadier General James Hamilton, followed the rough road south. Major General Baron von Riedesel commanded the left column following the river. Brigadier General Simon Fraser had the right hand column in the woods. The British Army only managed to travel six miles in two days. Finally, on 18 September an American patrol attacked British foragers, giving MG Burgoyne some idea of MG Gates' position.

MG Burgoyne decided on a three-pronged attack. The largest force, of 2000 men commanded by BG Fraser, was to try to outflank the American left. The British center, 1100

men under BG Hamilton, and the British left, a similar sized force under MG Riedesel, were to pin the American forces in place on Bemis Heights until BG Fraser could hit them from the flank. At 10:00 in the morning on 19 September 1777, a cannon was fired to signal the start of the British advance.

Major General Horatio Gates was in charge of the American forces that were dug into defensive positions around Bemis Heights. An American patrol on the eastern bank of the Hudson River reported to MG Gates that the British forces were on the move toward Bemis Heights. By 12:30 P.M., the advance guard of the center column had reached Freeman's Farm. MG Burgoyne halted there and awaited word from BG Fraser. MG Riedesel had been slowed while repairing bridges, but had reached a point due east of Freeman's Farm. MG Gates was content to make no response, but Brigadier General Benedict Arnold urged him to action. A young colonel named James Wilkinson was sent to reconnoiter the British positions. Upon his return, Col Wilkerson reported to MG Gates stating, "Their front is open, and their flanks rest on the woods, under cover of which they may be attacked; their right is skirted by a lofty height. I would indulge them" (Byrd 100). MG Gates sent out Colonel Daniel Morgan and his rifle company, supported by 300 New Hampshire light infantry under Major Henry Dearborn to make contact. At about 12:45 P.M. the first shots of the battle were fired when COL Morgan's men picked off every officer in MG Burgoyne's advance guard located at the cabin on Freeman's Farm. The advance guard retreated, which brought on an unauthorized charge by COL Morgan's men. The charge dissipated when they ran into BG Hamilton's main body. A turkey call brought the men back to COL Morgan's position in the woods.

Some of the British soldiers actually fired on their own men in the confusion following the charge by COL Morgan's men (Ketchum 397). MG Burgoyne decided to respond quickly

and instead of waiting for word on BG Fraser's position, he signaled to the other two columns that he was moving out. By 1:00 P.M., the center column had formed along the northern edge of the clearing at Freeman's Farm without opposition. COL Morgan and MAJ Dearborn had taken up positions along the southern edge of the same clearing, while some seven regiments had moved forward from the American fortifications at Bemis Heights as reinforcements. The Americans would fire from cover and then charge, while the British regrouped, but they were repelled by British forces using bayonets. This action continued back and forth for more than three hours. The Americans had greater numbers but the British had artillery and experience. Captain Pausch, in command of two 6-pound cannons posted at the front between the English and the Germans, wrote that the Americans "advanced madly and blindly in the face of furious fire" (Byrd 101).

Brigadier General Benedict Arnold recognized how vulnerable the British were while advancing, and pestered MG Gates to allow him to advance. Eventually, MG Gates gave in and allowed most of BG Arnold's wing to advance. This advance force met with the British center at Freeman's Farm, one mile north of the American positions on Bemis Heights. It was here that the battle developed. The American assault was determined and at one point, the British line was forced back, although a determined British counter attack managed to regain the line. Benedict Arnold was at the forefront of the fighting, and his attacking spirit helped inspire his men. The British had not been expecting the Americans to put up such a good fight. As the afternoon drew on, the British began to weaken.

BG Arnold went back to Bemis Height's to brief MG Gates on the battle and request more soldiers to push the British forces back. MG Gates refused to reinforce a furious BG Arnold, who believed that he could have destroyed the British Army with a little help from his

commander. MG Gates was apparently playing his customary waiting game, certain that "there were other and less expensive means of reducing his foe than by blood and carnage" (Ketchum 406). MG Gates' attitude can be defended, in that all the ferocity of the fighting. BG Arnold was only facing at most a quarter of the British Army, and MG Gates could not risk weakening his main position with BG Fraser's strong British force somewhere in the woods. Finally, as evening drew in, the British position was saved by the arrival of MG Riedesel's forces. BG Arnold was forced to withdraw, and the British held the battlefield.

The main significance of the Battle of Freeman's Farm is that in a few hours the British had suffered very heavy casualties, losing 566 regulars killed and wounded half of BG Hamilton's force. The British Army had no way of replacing the dead or wounded soldiers. The Americans had also suffered heavily, but they were able to replace their losses, and indeed, over the next few weeks the American Army was to grow dramatically. MG Burgoyne was of the opinion that a British attack on the next day would have defeated the Americans, but his own army was in far too poor a condition to consider such an attack. MG Burgoyne then delayed a second attack further on news that MG Clinton was launching an attack up the Hudson from New York. By the time MG Burgoyne was ready to attack again, the moment had been lost. On 7 October 1777, MG Burgoyne began his attack towards the well fortified and dug in American forces at Bemis Heights. This is why the Battle of Freeman's Farm was one of the most important battles of the American's fight for independence and the turning point of America's Revolutionary War.

The Battle of Bemis Heights proved to be the decisive blow that demoralized Burgoyne's British forces causing them to surrender at Saratoga. After learning that the British were approaching, Gates sent out a contingent including Morgan's rifleman to meet

them. Here the second and last major engagement in the Battle of Saratoga developed known as the Battle of Bemis Heights. American forces under Major General Horatio Gates repelled the British Lt. General John Burgoyne's attempt to take their fortified position on the heights.

Major General John Burgoyne now ordered his force to entrench around Freeman's Farm. He was waiting for Lt. General Sir Henry Clinton, who was supposedly preparing to leave New York City and march north to Albany. Burgoyne waited for three weeks, but Clinton did not come. Burgoyne was now once again low on supplies and facing an American army that was growing in numbers. He could wait no longer. He had to choose to either retreat or engage General Gates (Wikipedia).

Like the first battle of Saratoga, his plan focused upon a reconnaissance in force of three columns. MG Burgoyne sent a British force of 1,500 to test the American left flank. They advanced about three quarters of a mile to the edge of Barber's wheatfield where they deployed. As a reconnaissance, it was a complete failure, for nothing could be seen of the American lines. However, the Americans had seen them, and Gates sent out Morgan's rifleman to, as he put it "start the game" (Furneaux 224). Morgan and Dearborn assailed the British right composed of the light infantry companies under Major Lord Balcarres. At about 3 p.m., Enoch Poor's brigade of some 800 men attacked the British left composed of the grenadiers under Major John Dyke Acland. The British line was repeatedly broken, but rallied repeatedly. The British were out of their element fighting in the rough terrain of Mill Creek and both flanks gave away (Luzader54).

Meanwhile, at Gates' headquarters, Benedict Arnold paced nervously at the sounds of the battle. Arnold had been at odds with Gates. Gates removed him from command and confined to him to his tent. Gates refused to see him. He finally saw an opportunity so he got

on his horse and rode towards the firing. Gates' only reaction was to send Major Armstrong out to order his return, but Armstrong could not catch up with him.

Arnold went first to the light battalions on the west of the line. When he saw Fraser rally his men repeatedly, he told Morgan that the man was worth a regiment. Morgan by ordering him shot, and a sharpshooter named Timothy Murphy obliged. Fraser fell mortally wounded, and his advance fell apart (Furneaux 235).

Next Arnold rode to the central action. Learned's men were having a rough time handling the Hessian advance, and were yielding ground. Arnold helped to rally them, and with Brigadier General Ebenezer Learned the Commander of the Continental Brigade from Massachusetts, he led their counter attack. When Morgan, Dearborn, and Poor began to close on their sides, the Hessians also withdrew to their starting positions.

After about an hour of the beginning of the battle, the British were forced to fall back to their fortifications around Freeman's Farm. The Americans now believed that victory was theirs, but the British heavy entrenchments proved difficult to overwhelm. After failing to overrun one redoubt, General Arnold led the attack on another that was manned by Germans. He succeeded, but received a wound in the leg he had earlier injured during the invasion of Canada, but Learned's brigade carried the redoubt (Wikipedia).

Even though his injury kept him from combat, Arnold went to BG John Paterson's brigade to encourage him to support the earlier attacks. Here, Gates' orders caught up with him and he was removed from action. Darkness ended the battle, and saved Burgoyne from further defeat. During the night, he left campfires burning and withdrew to a large redoubt. He had suffered 1,000 casualties to only 500 for the Americans. The following night he

retreated to fortifications at Saratoga, New York, where the American force, which now numbered 20, 000 surrounded the British force of 6,000.

On the morning of October 8, Burgoyne was back in the fortified positions he had held on September 16. However, he was weaker than before, and had fewer supplies. The American forces were still growing stronger. The following day, he withdrew another eight miles to Saratoga. The stage was set for the final act of the battle and his later surrender. Burgoyne finally surrendered on October 17 at Saratoga (Luzader 63).

The Battle of Bemis Heights proved to be the decisive blow that demoralized Burgoyne's British forces causing them to surrender at Saratoga. At Bemis Heights, Gate's defensive tactics insured a tactical victory for the Patriots, especially with Arnold seizing the opportunity to take the offensive and lead a counterattack while Burgoyne was vulnerable, weak, and starving. This bold move so badly wounded the British forces that Burgoyne surrendered days later at Saratoga. What had been at stake soon became obvious. In February 1778, France negotiated a treaty of alliance with the American states, tantamount to a declaration of war against England.

Britain's disastrous loss at the Battle of Saratoga would prove more than any other event to be decisive in the eventual outcome of the War of Independence. The Battle of Saratoga was the turning point in the American's War of Independence even though the War of Independence lasted another six years. It was "a climactic finale to a three-year struggle for a strategic military position – the Hudson-St. Lawrence waterway" (Byrd 2). "This water route provided the main transportation route for people and goods moving north-south". "If the British could control the Hudson, they could divide the long, narrow strip of coastal America in two". "This would isolate New England where rebel resistance was strongest

from the remainder of the colonies” (Byrd 4). In the first Battle at Freeman’s Farm, the British lost two men for every one American casualty. During the second Battle at Bemis Heights, the British lost four men for every American casualty. The Battle of Saratoga proved to the world that the American Army was an effective fighting force capable of defeating the highly trained British forces in a major confrontation and forcing them to surrender. The European powers, mainly the French became supportive of the Americans cause and they began to support their effort against the British.

In the beginning, the Major General Burgoyne’s plan in July 1777 of advancing three British columns to meet in Albany, New York seemed to be working with victories at Ticonderoga and Hubbardton. The British wanted to seize Albany and control the Hudson River and the entire rebel colony of New York. They had isolated the Continental forces and pushed them back southward along the Hudson River. Under the Command of Major General Benedict Arnold, a force of 1000 was detached to move west to slow down the British second column’s easterly advance along the Mohawk River. They drove back the British and were able to return in time to fight at the Battle of Saratoga. The British supplies were severely weakened and there were no reinforcements for the British during the Battle of Saratoga. The Americans on the other hand continued to get stronger and grow with reinforcements.

In an opposing view, an article written by a loyalist in January 1777 seemed to be a thorn in the British ideals and a turning point in the American Revolution. In January and February of 1776, Philadelphia, not New England, was the epicenter of the conflict with Great Britain. Despite bloodshed at Lexington and Concord and terrible losses at Bunker Hill, Tories and a few moderate Whigs hoped in vain for a last-minute reconciliation with the mother country. The motives for wanting such a miracle were naturally divided along party lines.

The Tories sought an end to the conflict before armed resistance spread throughout the colonies; some Whigs, on the other hand, felt they had flexed their muscles enough to show they were serious about not submitting to England's arbitrary rule of the colonies. The consequences of resistance went beyond what most colonists and Britons expected. Rebellion was about to become revolution. Mostly because of a simple pamphlet titled the "Common Sense" written by Benjamin Franklin's friend Thomas Paine (Ketchum 6). On Wednesday, January 10, 1776, the words of a virtually unknown English dissident would change the world forever.

Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* was like a lightning bolt in the colonies. Its message was simple: Britain had no right to govern America, the Monarchy system itself was corrupt, and Americans would be much better off on their own. "His object in bringing this out in the open was to provoke a dialogue that would lay the groundwork for a more sound Constitution and perfect scheme of Government" (Ketchum 6). His arguments certainly struck a chord with the colonists. The French and Indian War of the 1750s had shown the colonists just how far they had drifted from their English counterparts in nearly every aspect of politics and culture. England saw colonists as crude and uneducated, while the English were seen as drunk with power and subservient to a monarchy that had no meaning to the average colonist, who pretty much lived by his own rules.

Once the news of America's victory reached Europe, the French upon learning of this victory soon officially declared War on Britain by signing a treaty in February 1778 recognizing American independence and becoming an active ally. This was not a small skirmish but a defeat of a major British Army. France entered the war on America's side and sent supplies, money, arms, and ammunition to their cause. This support provided

Washington's Continental Army the necessary means to continue its fight with Great Britain. This support alone proved decisive in determining the eventual outcome of the War.

The loss for Britain at Saratoga proved disastrous. It weakened the current British government under Lord North. European powers now realized that the colonial rebels were capable of defeating the English on their own. The colonial forces gained the much-needed momentum by improving morale and recruitment. Spain joined the war against the British shortly after the French. The support of the allies' money, supplies, and troops would eventually be too much for the British to overcome the American forces. These supplies sustained the patriots until the French Navy and Army were able to take part in joint operations with American forces (Wood 171). The Battle of Saratoga was not only a turning point in the Revolution and the War of Independence, but also in the long history of warfare (Byrd 116).

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